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*For Immediate Release*

## **U.S. Tobacco Cooperative to Audit 100% of Growers in 2016**

Raleigh, NC - U.S. Tobacco Cooperative Inc. (USTC), is implementing grower audits for all members starting with the 2016 crop. The program seeks to ensure that U.S. flue-cured tobacco from USTC is produced in a manner that is competitive, sustainable, compliant and safe for all parties involved in the process.

“We want to ensure our growers have agricultural practices which produce a quality tobacco crop while protecting, sustaining or enhancing the environment with regard to soil, water, and plant life as well as ensuring and protecting the rights of laborers,” said U.S. Tobacco Cooperative Chief Executive Officer Stuart Thompson.

Each farm with a USTC contract will be independently audited this year by GAP Connections. The focus is on overall crop management which would include items such as crop rotation, seed selection, curing barn management, the elimination of NTRM (non-tobacco related materials), crop storage, agrochemical use, training, farm management, and labor concerns.

In 2015, USTC announced its participation in the Social Responsibility in Tobacco Production (SRTP) program. The SRTP program ensures that industry standards are being adhered to throughout the product cycle from seed to final delivery. SRTP balances tobacco production with positive environmental management, soil and water conservation and appropriate use of agrochemicals. In addition, environmental and health and safety standards are also factors in the program.

“SRTP has become the industry standard in tobacco production, providing guidance and support, validation, and a step based approach to facilitate continuous improvement. The SRTP program is used globally by tobacco companies to encourage clear and consistent standards across the industry. USTC plans to set the standard for the U.S. in the tobacco industry” said Thompson.

For more information on U.S. Tobacco Cooperative Inc., visit [www.usleaf.com](http://www.usleaf.com).

### **About U.S. Tobacco Cooperative Inc.**

U.S. Tobacco Cooperative Inc. (USTC) is a grower owned marketing cooperative located in Raleigh, North Carolina. The cooperative produces U.S. flue-cured tobacco grown by 850 member growers in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia. Member grower tobacco is processed and sold as raw materials to cigarette manufacturers worldwide. USTC also produces consumer products for the U.S. market under brand names of Wildhorse, 1839, Shield, 1<sup>st</sup> Class, Ultra Buy and Traffic.